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Senate

The Senate met at 1 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, a Senator from the State of Rhode Island.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal God, You only are immortal, so today we offer our thanksgiving. Thank You for life and for opportunities to make our Nation stronger. Thank You for the peace You give, even in the midst of storms. Use our Senators today, filling them with strength and purpose. May they labor to encourage the right and correct the wrong. When they meet with reversal and failure, may they not become weary but continue to work to fulfill Your will.

We pray in Your sacred Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable SHELDON WHITEHOUSE led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

The assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, December 21, 2012.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, a Senator from the State of Rhode Island, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

SCHEDULE

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from North Carolina.

Mrs. HAGAN. Mr. President, following leader remarks, the Senate will begin consideration of the conference report to accompany H.R. 4310, the National Defense Authorization Act. The filing deadline for second-degree amendments to the emergency supplemental bill is 1:30 p.m. today.

At approximately 2 p.m., there will be a rollcall vote on adoption of the national defense conference report. We will work on an agreement for amendments in order to complete action on the supplemental as well as an agreement on FISA.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

THE FISCAL CLIFF

Mr. REID. Mr. President, last night the House of Representatives proved what we have known for quite a while: Speaker BOEHNER's plan to raise taxes on 25 million middle-class taxpayers while handing out \$50,000 bonuses to millionaires and billionaires was dead on arrival. We said that yesterday. We knew the so-called Plan B was no plan at all. It couldn't pass the Senate. It turns out it couldn't pass the House either. It is too bad Speaker BOEHNER wasted 1 week on this futile political stunt, and that is all we can call it.

But at least now House Republicans have gotten the message loudly and clearly that any comprehensive solution to the looming fiscal cliff will need to be a bipartisan solution. No

comprehensive agreement can pass either Chamber without both Democratic and Republican votes, which means any solution will have to ask the most fortunate among us to pay a little more to reduce the deficit and ensure partisanship doesn't take the Nation to the brink of default.

Nothing that has passed the House of Representatives fits that test—nothing. A few days ago President Obama and Speaker BOEHNER appeared poised to strike a grand bargain, but we have heard that before. Instead of making hard choices of compromise, as President Obama has been willing to do, the Speaker retreated to his corner and resorted to political stunts, but that stunt fell flat.

It is time for the Speaker and all Republicans to return to the negotiating table. We have never left. It is time for Republicans to work with us to find the middle ground. That is the only hope of averting the devastating impacts of the fiscal cliff. The fiscal cliff needs to be avoided.

In the meantime, the Speaker should bring the middle-class tax cut passed by the Senate 5 months ago to the floor of the House for a vote. We know it will pass. All he has to do is let Democrats vote with some Republicans and it will pass. The clock is ticking until the Nation goes over the fiscal cliff and taxes go up for every family in America. But there is still time for the Speaker to hit the brakes and avoid that cliff. We don't need the "Thelma and Louise" projection over that cliff.

The Senate-passed bill would protect 98 percent of families and 97 percent of small businesses from crippling tax hikes while President Obama and the Speaker work toward a compromise agreement. That agreement should be comprehensive. If Republicans truly want to ensure American families' taxes don't go up on January 1, they should simply pass the Senate bill. The only reason Speaker BOEHNER hasn't brought our bill to the floor sooner is

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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